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Argentina: Terrorist Tactics 3.5(c)

The terrorist Montoneros are trying to get sympathetic ordinary citizens to participate in sabotage operations against the military government.

According to a recently captured document, the Montoneros call sabotage of business and industry a central element of their latest campaign and point out that disruptive acts can be carried out easily by individuals within a given plant with minimal risk. The document claims that sabotage will refute the government claim that the terrorists are on the run, and will do visible damage to the "enemy."

To gain worker sympathy, the Montoneros are calling for stepped up action against large companies that have been firing or laying off employees. The terrorists urge destruction of stock on hand, but avoidance of disrupting the early stages of production which would jeopardize workers' jobs. They also call for destruction of files and computers in government offices, but no actions that would directly harm workers.

To achieve wider participation of citizens, the Montoneros reportedly have formed "neighborhood resistance centers" which are to organize and coordinate disparate elements opposed to the military government. The Montoneros also have backed the creation of a resistance labor organization to mobilize workers.

This tactic is a substantial change from past practices, in which the terrorists stressed highly compartmented, sophisticated operations requiring trained individuals. The Montoneros have not abandoned all such operations, but may, on one hand, now believe that time and circumstance call for

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different measures. Their emphasis on broadened citizen participation, on the other hand, may reflect lessened terrorist capability after many months of relentless counterinsurgency by the military.

The success of the new tactic is difficult to assess at this time. Nonetheless, the terrorists appear to have made relatively little headway in efforts to exploit a protracted strike by power workers that now appears to be nearing solution.

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Argentina: Taps For Terrorists?

The losses suffered by Argentine guerrillas in recent weeks greatly exceed the actual numbers of those arrested and killed. They have lost hideouts, weapons, ammunition, and documents containing valuable operational information.

Urban guerrilla warfare has relied heavily on terrorist tactics. Terror--according to one scholar's definition--consists of symbolic acts that are designed to influence political behavior by extraordinary means, entailing the use or threat of violence. In Argentina, leftist guerrillas have placed a heavy emphasis on the symbolic nature of their violent acts--kidnaping and killing military officers and police chiefs, foreign diplomats, and wealthy businessmen--both domestic and foreign.

By skillfully executing operations against these political targets for several years, the Peoples Revolutionary Army and the Montoneros cultivated an image of invincibility. In recent months, however, the Peoples Revolutionary Army has been unable to sustain this image. It is no longer able to commit acts of violence at will without incurring heavy losses. Moreover, the terrorists no longer seem to retain the tacit support of the public that is crucial for the survival of a guerrilla movement.

The assassination last month of the newly appointed federal police chief Cardozo may have been a major turning point in popular alienation from the guerrilla cause. Cardozo,a virtual political unknown, died in the explosion of a bomb placed under his bed by a fourteen-year-old girl friend of his daughter. The horrifying aspects of this act have been played up in the Argentine press. The staid and respected Review of the River Plate recently commented in a

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lead editorial: "She had eaten at their table and slept under their roof. Fatherly love had been exploited through this faked friendship with the daughter of the victim. The murderess was very young. Her alleged ideological inclinations had been respected, which shows a considerable effort by her victim to place human values above political differences. Each and every one of these circumstances, by themselves, are sufficient to classify this as an atrocity." It is significant that neither the Montoneros nor the Peoples Revolutionary Army took customary public credit for the killing.

More significant than the fact that it happened is the way in which it happened. Argentine guerrillas have not been completely indiscriminate in their use of terrorism, but have restricted their targets to identified political enemies. Even then when excesses occurred--as in the killing last year of a three-year-old in an attack on her father, an army major--they usually were the culmination of a particular terrorist campaign that then quickly stopped. The Cardozo atrocity suggests that terrorism is out of control, that the chain of command has broken down, or that the guerrilla cadre, at least, has lost sight of its original political objectives.

The Tupamaro experience in Uruguay may be a parallel. Until the Tupamaros directed the full weight of their firepower against the military, they were still a viable movement. The turning point came on April 14, 1972, when they stung the government into declaring a "State of Internal War" by gunning down two policemen, a naval officer, and a former interior minister. Thereafter the Tupamaro decline was swift and complete.

In recent months the Peoples Revolutionary Army has been the central target of the Argentine anti-subversive campaign, but the Montoneros have suffered as well. More than seven months have elapsed since

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Montonero chieftain Roberto Quieto was captured by security forces. During that period the guerrillas have made no known attempt to free him or to secure his release. This lack of response suggests that his comrades now lack the ability or the confidence to make the same kind of demands that they did when they kidnaped US honorary consul John Egan two years ago.

The latter possibility seems more likely. As long as political activity was legal in Argentina, the Montoneros could operate as a guerrilla organization and as the renegade faction of the Peronist party--under the banner of the "Authentic Party." With overt political activity banned and the guerrillas on the run, the safest course is to go underground and regroup.

Even the safe course, however, in guerrilla activity spells defeat. Terrorism is aimed first at the audience--the general public--and only incidentally at its victims. When violence stops, the crucial elements of fear and publicity disappear.

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